RAJYA SABHA

Thursday, the 2nd December, 2004/11 *Agrahayana,* 1926 *(Saka)*

The House met at eleven of the clock,

MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

INTRODUCTION OF MINISTER

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Chairman, Sir, with your permission, I wish to introduce to you and, through you, to the august House, Shri Shibu Soren, Minister of Coal, who has recently been inducted in the Council of Ministers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Pendency of passport applications

*21. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a number of passport applications are pending in the country, especially in Tamil Nadu;

(b) if so, whether it is proposed to set up one more passport office at Madurai considering the heavy workload at Trichy Office, to clear the backlog;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) There are pending applications of varying numbers in the 30 Passport Offices in the country. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, as on 31.10.2004, the number of pending applications in Passport Offices in Chennai and Trichy are 12,535 and 7,635 respectively.

(b) and (c) No Sir.

(d) A decision to open a new Passport Office is taken on the basis of several factors such as workload and availability of resources. Further, as per the recommendations of the Standing Committee of Parliament on External Affairs, there should be a minimum of 50,000 applications per annum from an area where a new passport office is proposed to be opened. This criterion is not met in the case of Madurai from where the number of applications received in a year is much less.

SHRI C. PERUMAL: Sir, the Standing Committee fixes the criteria, but the Ministry can recommend to the Committee to review the criteria for opening up of new passport offices. I want to know from the hon. Minister by when the pending applications in Madras and Trichy Offices will be cleared and why such a delay is there.

SHRI E. AHAMMED: Sir, the Government is taking all measures to clear the pendency as early as possible, and the recommendation to the Standing Committee on External Affairs is a matter which is also with this House.

MR. CHAIRMAN: How much time will it take to clear all these applications?

SHRI E. AHAMMED: Sir, the clearance of passport applications is an ongoing process. It is mainly depending on the police verification and other details. As soon as it is given, we will be doing. Sir, the clearance statistics show that recently there has been sufficient clearance.

SHRI C. PERUMAL: Sir, my second supplementary is: If existing Passport Offices did not meet the criteria, whether any passport office has been opened. If so, the details thereof; and whether any relaxation can be made in opening up of offices.

SHRI E. AHAMMED: Sir, we have now envisaged the policy of decentralisation of the passport offices. Instead of having passport office at every place, we have been implementing that district passport offices are opened. The district passport office where every applicant can go and submit his application, will directly be sending it to the police for verification. As soon as the verification is over, that will be given to the Passport Office and the insurance of passport will be very easy. So, we are reducing the period of delay.

SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the Ministry is aware of the fact that the building of

Chennai Passport Office is not of its own even now. That building was constrcuted earlier. There was some legal dispute, and it is over now. Till now, the new building has not been taken over by the Passport Office.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is not a question concerning the building. Please excuse me.

SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Sir, I want to put my second question. The Minister has answered a question regarding the police verification. Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister—since passport applications are sent to the Police Department for police verification and they are taking a lot of time in sending reports from to the Passport Offices—whether the Ministry will fixup a time-limit for getting a report from the police officer.

SHRI E. AHAMMED: Sir, usually, it should be done within 30 days, but it is not possible in this respect because it depends upon the State and the region. There are several big States where police verification will, naturally, be dalayed. Sometimes when they go for verification, applicant will not be there. However, we have taken up the matter with State Governments to expedite police verifications, at the earliest, so as to enable us to issue passports.

Modernization of Postal Department

*22. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA. Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMAITON TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) what measures are being taken by Government to modernise the Postal Department;

(b) how optimally the Department of Posts is utilising V-SATs;

(c) the details of centres that are covered by V-SAT in the country, State-wise; and

(d) what innovative areas the Department of posts is looking for, apart from regular post and e-post?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.